

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

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NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ACQUISITION

OF FOUR 1960s "PROJECTION PIECES" BY JAMES TURRELL

MADE POSSIBLE BY THE BROWN FOUNDATION, INC., OF HOUSTON;

ARTIST TO GIVE GALLERY A FIFTH INSTALLATION PIECE

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The National Gallery of Art has acquired four classic early works by the renowned installation artist James Turrell. They are Royce (1967), a horizontal single-wall projection; Artar (1967), a vertical cut-out projection; and Amba (1968) and Orca (1968), two end-wall projections. Turrell's work, which is closely related to minimalist abstraction, is devoted solely to the optical experience of light and space. The acquisitions and their future installation were made possible by a grant from The Brown Foundation, Inc., of Houston.

On the occasion of this acquisition, Turrell has announced that he will donate a fifth installation piece to the National Gallery. This gift, a work from his Space Division series, will be selected by the Gallery.

"The four projection pieces by Turrell constitute the Gallery's first acquisition of installation art and signal our twenty-first century goals for the collection of modern and contemporary art, which are to acquire masterpieces of classic modern art that fill gaps in the collection and the finest examples of major artistic movements of the last fifty years, including minimal, conceptual, and installation art. The Brown Foundation, Inc., of Houston, has been instrumental in helping us get this effort underway," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We are also very grateful to James Turrell for donating a fifth work."

The installation of works by Turrell, on dates to be announced, will take place in the East Building, which has been the home of the nation's collection of twentieth-century art since the landmark modern structure opened to the public in 1978. As "projection pieces," the works actually comprise plans and specifications and the exclusive rights to create the individual installations.

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"Turrell's early projection pieces are physically simple but psychologically haunting and conceptually complex. His subject matter in these works—how pure perceptual experience facilitates the experience of consciousness itself—is unique," said Jeffrey Weiss, head of the department of modern and contemporary art, National Gallery of Art.

The four projection pieces have been selected by Turrell to represent the development of his early classic work in the 1960s. Royce and Artar are examples of the artist's single-wall projections, in which pure planar shapes are created with white light from a single projector. Amba and Orca are two-projector end-wall pieces. They are among the first works by Turrell that fill an entire wall, a principle from which all of his later work would be derived. Each of the four pieces creates striking, quasi-illusionistic optical effects that alter one's visual and physical sensation of interior space. The scale, presence, and composition of Amba and Orca were inspired by the works of Barnett Newman, with specific reference to the Stations of the Cross, a series of paintings from the 1950s and 1960s that is in the collection of the National Gallery of Art.

James Turrell (b.1943) belongs to a group of artists who pioneered installation art on the West Coast during the 1960s. In 1966 Turrell began transforming studio spaces into "perceptual environments," ethereal installations created with bare walls and projected light. In these works Turrell isolates light as a perceptual sensation unto itself, one in which purely optical effects acquire an almost bodily presence. Later, with his Roden Crater project and related works, Turrell would turn to natural light, creating "chambers" in which framed views transform the illuminated atmosphere of the desert sky into abstract optical fields. Previously, Turrell was represented in the Gallery's collection by prints and photographs related to the Roden Crater.

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden, located on the National Mall between Third and Ninth Streets, N.W., are open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. During the summer through Labor Day, September 4, the Sculpture Garden is open daily until 7 p.m. Admission is free. For general information call (202) 737-4215, the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov. To receive the Gallery's free bimonthly Calendar of Events, call (202) 842-6662.

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